News from the Wyoming Department of Health

Tuesday, August 1, 2006

Bible Camp Outbreak Investigation Continues

As the Wyoming Department of Health continues investigating a gastroenteritis outbreak associated with a bible camp, laboratory testing has confirmed *Campylobacter jejuni* (campy) and norovirus infections among attendees and fecal contamination of the facility's water supply.

"This is an extremely complicated outbreak given the number of people involved and the fact that multiple infections have been identified in case patients," says Kelly Weidenbach, surveillance epidemiologist with the Wyoming Department of Health Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program.

Since mid-June more than 300 people attended programs at Camp Grace, which is located in northeast Albany County near Wheatland. Approximately 175 individuals have been interviewed as of July 31, with more than 88 individuals reporting gastrointestinal illness after attending the camp. The department has also identified nearly 20 individuals who did not attend the camp, but who developed gastrointestinal illness after a family member who attended camp did. Attendees are primarily from Converse, Platte, Natrona, Albany, Laramie, Uinta, Fremont, Niobrara and Weston counties in Wyoming, with others from Colorado, Nebraska, South Dakota, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Washington.

Laboratory results are complete on 12 individuals who submitted stool cultures to the Wyoming Public Health Laboratory, and multiple infections have been identified in these individuals. Six case patients have laboratory-confirmed *Campylobacter jejuni* (campy) infections, and nine case patients are infected with norovirus with multiple strains detected. Three case patients have tested positive for both infections. Laboratory results on additional case patients are still pending.

WDH is conducting a thorough environmental health assessment of the camp and its water and wastewater systems with help from the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality and the Wyoming Department of Agriculture Consumer Health Services. Public health officials from WDH and engineers from DEQ visited the camp last Tuesday and found multiple problems with the water and wastewater systems. The identification of these problems coincides with water samples that tested positive for fecal contamination.

"Camp officials are working cooperatively with investigators to further determine the source of the illnesses and to alleviate the potential for future problems," Weidenbach said. Camp directors voluntarily shut down the camp on July 19.

The department is continuing interviews and is expected to identify more ill persons. The epidemiologic investigation is ongoing and involves many pieces including human testing, water testing and a survey-like study to determine risk factors for illness.

For more information on norovirus and campylobacter, please visit the Department of Health home page at www.healthywyoming.org.

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